

On-Site Inventory Project

Contact Lenses

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Today's object profile is yet another relatively everyday thing: contact lenses. I wear contacts, and I must admit that I've taken the whole "soft-lens" reality for granted. That changed the other day when we uncovered two mysterious cases containing hard contact lenses. It's difficult to imagine one would want to put those lenses in their eyes. It also prompted me to think a little bit about the history of corrective eyewear-specifically the contact lens.



Hard plastic contact lenses and case (RHM# 2004.066.001)

It turns out the contact lens is another one of those strange things that was once envisioned by Leonardo Da Vinci in the 1500s. Of course, it took a while before someone felt confident enough in their idea of a corrective lens to go sticking one in their eye. In the 1880s work with lenses began in earnest and by 1889 a model of huge glass lenses that covered the entire eye were used by a very small number of people. It was in 1948 before the lens was made of a hard plastic and the size changed to fit just over the iris, rather than extending over the whites of the eye. And still, it took another quarter of a century before the materials advanced enough for contact lenses to be widely marketable-and soft!

I hope you enjoy these images of the contact lenses (never before seen from the collection) and the brief history of the lengths people will go to so they don't have to wear glasses. Have an excellent day!



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